

PRESS RELEASE

16th December 2003

Demolition man escapes prison

An Ashton tenant whose disastrous DIY attempts demolished two flats has escaped a prison sentence.

Tameside Magistrates Court had heard how Kenneth Wharton of Hope Street in Ashton-under-Lyne had decided to make some internal alterations to his home. He didn't bother to seek the advice or approval of his landlord, New Charter. His bungled attempt could have resulted in death. Wharton removed the load-bearing wall in his downstairs flat, causing the collapse of the flat above.

Wharton denied the charge of criminal damage, but was found guilty and was back in court for sentencing today.

Magistrates told Wharton that normally they would give an immediate custodial sentence. However, they took into account the lack of any previous history and the fact the Court



found criminal damage based on recklessness rather than intent. They were also given a psychiatric report that suggested Wharton was suffering from a number of problems at the time of the offence. Wharton was ordered to pay £500 compensation repayable at £5 per week and given a Community Rehabilitation Order for 12 months.

Wharton is still legally the assured tenant of the flat on Hope Street. New Charter has served notice of possession action and anticipate proceedings to be issued in early January 2004.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. New Charter formed in 1999 as the new landlords to own and manage nearly 16,400 properties transferred from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in Greater Manchester. With a turnover of £49million a year and a workforce of almost 800, New Charter is one of the twenty largest Registered Social Landlords (RSL's), and is regulated by The Housing Corporation, a Government watchdog.
2. The property collapse of 71 and 72 Hope Street occurred on the morning of Thursday 28th February 2002. The upstairs flat was not occupied at the time.
3. Despite our immediate efforts to help Mr Wharton before the true reason for the collapse emerged, he subsequently threatened staff and wrote threatening letters to employees. This resulted in his licence to enter New Charter's offices and shops being revoked at a Court hearing in early April 2002.
4. Tameside Magistrates Court sitting on 17th and 18th November 2003 found Wharton guilty of a charge of criminal damage, and adjourned the case for pre-sentence reports.
5. Rebuilding work is complete.

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